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ADMINISTRATION NOT TALKING ABOUT COVERT NICARAGUA

BY MATTHEW C. QUINN

WASHINGTON (UPI) -- ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS WIL
NOR DENY A REPORT THAT PRESIDENT REAGAN HAS APPROVE
PLAN AGAINST NICARAGUA THAT A CONGRESSIONAL CRITIC
DECLARATION OF WAR."

"IT IS ALMOST AS IF THE ADMINISTRATION WANTS A WAR IN CENTRAL AMERICA," SAID REP. MICHAEL BARNES, D-MD., CHAIRMAN OF THE HOUSE INTER-AMERICAN AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE AND A FERVENT CRITIC OF THE ADMINISTRATION'S CENTRAL AMERICAN POLICIES.

HE WAS REACTING TO A REPORT IN THE WASHINGTON POST THAT REAGAN AUTHORIZED A $19 MILLION PROGRAM TO DESTABILIZE THE LEFTIST NICARAGUAN REGIME THE ADMINISTRATION CHARGES IS AIDING GUERILLAS IN EL SALVADOR.

CBS NEWS REPORTED WEDNESDAY THAT A CIA-DIRECTED SECRET COMMANDO FORCE IS ALREADY TRAINING IN HONDURAS FOR OPERATIONS AGAINST NICARAGUA. QUOTING SOURCES, THE NETWORK SAID PERHAPS AS MANY AS 500 COMMANDOES -- ALL LATIN AMERICANS -- ARE IN THE FIELD. THEY SAID NONE OF THEM ARE U.S. CITIZENS BUT THAT THE CIA IS FOOTING THE BILL.

THE POST SAID THE PLAN INCLUDES HAVING THE CIA CREATE A PARAMILITARY FORCE OF UP TO 500 LATIN AMERICANS THAT WOULD OPERATE FROM COMMANDO CAMPS SPREAD ALONG THE NICARAGUAN-HONDURAN BORDER.

"THAT, AGAIN, IS SOMETHING I CAN'T COMMENT ON," SAID REAGAN, WHEN ASKED IF THE POST REPORT WERE TRUE.

BARNES SAID HE WANTED TO KNOW WHY THE ADMINISTRATION 'IS WHIPPING UP THIS WAR HYSTERIA" OVER NICARAGUA.

"WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO DO?" BARNES SAID IN A STATEMENT. "... THIS IS NOT ONLY EMBARRASSING, IT IS FRIGHTENING."

JOHN GREANEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE 3,200-MEMBER ASSOCIATION OF RETIRED INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS, CALLED THE POST "ABSOLUTELY UN-AMERICAN" FOR DISCLOSING A COVERT PLAN.

"IT IS OBVIOUSLY NOT A COVERT OPERATION WHEN THE POST IS GOING TO DISCUSS THE WHOLE THING ON THE FRONT PAGE," HE SAID.

POST EXECUTIVE EDITOR BENJAMIN BRADLEE SAID LATE WEDNESDAY GREANEY WAS "THE FIRST PERSON TO SAY ANYTHING" ABOUT THE POST'S COVERAGE AND HE WOULD HAVE NO FURTHER COMMENT ON IT.

SECRETARY OF STATE ALEXANDER HAIG, DEFENSE SECRETARY CASPAR WEINBERGER AND SPOKESMAN FOR THE CIA AND THE WHITE HOUSE WERE TIGHT-LIPPED

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